

Newsletter

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From the Old Settlers History Woodford County 1877 by B.J. Radford

WOLVES ROAMED THE AREA. "Prairie **wolves** were numerous and familiar neighbors. They gave the early farmer nocturnal concerts, and paid themselves from his sheep pen, or his tender piglings. They seem to have born this peptics and they're always hungry. They would prowl in gangs and it was unsafe for a man to be among them alone at night. One of the favorite methods of exterminating them was the circle hunt, and was conducted as follows: as large a territory as practical was enclosed and the game-driven towards a central point, agreed upon beforehand. When the game was finally pinned by the riders near, the work of killing them began. The wolf which escaped through the line were chased down and dispatched with clubs. Deer would also be taken in the circles. Bounties were offered by the state for wolf scalps, and wolf hunting for a time became profitable. Money was scarce, and it was sometimes easier for the settlers to get enough scalps to pay his taxes. The poor wolf has about succumbed to his unceasing warfare, and we have seen his lank, familiar visage for almost the last time. To his old neighbors and acquaintances this is a matter of a small regret, which argues that Canus Lupus was a bad citizen." Old Settler's History Page14

EYE WITNESS ACCOUNT OF THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD - "There were a few citizens, living chiefly above Metamora, who possessed an intense hatred to southern slavery, and did not represent respect the Fugitive Slave Law. Investigation before the grand jury showed that in all probability, there existed in this vicinity one of what were called the 'stations of the **underground railroad**.' These were nothing more nor less than hiding places for fugitive slaves who were trying to make their way to Canada. The stations would be at convenient distances, such as could be driven or walked in a night, and the fugitives would travel in the darkness, and find concealment, shelter and provisions during the day at the hands of people who thought they were doing right in thus defeating a cruel and unjust law. It seems that there was a station in Tazewell County, one in Woodford and one in Bureau County connecting with others north and south, forming a continuous line from the slave states to Canada. There existed many such lines and these running through the northern states, and many a poor negro followed them to liberty. The existence of this station soon became known to the citizens of the county, but many did not seem to wish to interfere, and had little inclination to wrest the captive from the hands of his helpers and send him back to slavery. Some, however regarded them as lawbreakers, and much prejudice was stirred up, and at times excitement ran very high. I believe, however, that little or no violence was ever resorted to in Woodford County on this account." Old Settlers History 1877 Pg 58

LINCOLN STORY "While Judge Treat was presiding at Versailles, he would frequently summon the lawyers from their contests with the settlers in jumping and horseshoe pitching to attend to their business indoors. The officer would sometimes find **Lincoln** at these sports, with coat off and full of excitement, when needed in court. In those days the courtroom was the scene of the utmost good humor and hilarity. Jokes and antidotes were current, and attending court in the days of my boyhood, was better than a circus. The same spirit has not always characterized our legal proceedings, and I have witnessed in our County some disgusting and humiliating spectacles of bullying, browbeating and abuse. It is believed, however that this is a thing of the past, and our bar is at present characterized by a higher tone. Without attempting to blame anyone in particular, it is well for the fraternity to see to it that coarseness and profanity shall never again become so prevalent as formerly." Old Settler's History pages 61-62

Pantagraph, June 27, 1884

—A new industry has arisen in Metamora of late, the manufacture of false teeth for pet dogs.

—The Metamora brass band now appears in a uniform of sailor blue with brass buttons and cap to correspond.

—Dr. J. W. Whitmire amputated the middle left toe of A. Page, J. P., of Metamora, on Saturday. The operation was necessitated on account of necrosis of the bone of eight weeks standing,

Pantagraph February 23, 1883

—Under the new village ordinance of Metamora, which went into effect May 1st, the saloons of the place, five in number, are now closed.

Pantagraph May 9, 1884

His First Fee.

The first fee which Mr. Stevenson earned in his profession as a lawyer was \$10, which he received for the trial of a law suit over the ownership of a yearling calf. This case was contested away back in the 50's in a little town two miles from Metamora where he was then located. It took him nearly three days to make the trip from Metamora to the town and back to try the case before the justice. Whether his client was the winner in the law-suit Mr. Stevenson never made bold to assert. For it is not the usual thing for a lawyer to talk about his case when he loses. This \$10, which he earned at that time he carried back to Metamora and with it paid four weeks' board, including his washing and mending. It afterward transpired that the calf in dispute did not legally belong to either of the litigants.

Pantagraph June 19, 1914

This appeared in his obit



J. C. IRVING.

J. C. Irving is the only person in Metamora today who knew Abraham Lincoln. Mr. Irving was only a boy then, but his father would often take him with him, when he dropped over to the Metamora House to have a chat with the brilliant young lawyer, who, a few years later, was to take his place among the immortals. Mr. Irving remembers Mr. Lincoln distinctly, and frequently Mr. Lincoln would talk with him about things which would naturally interest a boy of that age. Mr. Irving has many mementoes of the Great Emancipator. One of these is a large walnut bedstead. This was the bed which Mr. Lincoln always occupied when he was in attendance at court in Metamora. When the Metamora House was demolished some years ago, Mr. Irving purchased the old bed and it is now in use in his home.

Pantagraph November 11, 1922

—There is a camp of Modern Woodmen, an order of Royal Neighbors and a Catholic order of Foresters.

—Several handsome new brick blocks have recently been erected at Metamora and business is increasing in all lines.

—There is a handsome public park in the center of the village, where in summer the excellent band plays every evening.

—Judge Page, one of the noted attorneys of Chicago, is a Metamora boy. His aged mother still resides here. Mr. George Page, a well-known lawyer of Peoria, was raised here.

—Metamora is settled all about with a most thrifty class of Germans who are making and saving money. There are also several French families, but all speak English as well as German.

—The Metamora Herald is a good newspaper and is the successor of the old Metamora Sentinel, edited by George Harl for something less than a century. He was the oldest editor in the state.

—Metamora has a very good public school with Prof. Colvin, of Normal, as principal. Mr. Lloyd Engle has charge of the grammar department. There are four teachers and 160 pupils in school.

—Mr. Cass Irving is one of the oldest residents and is also one of the foremost collectors of Indian relics and geological specimens in the state. His collection is the result of forty years of labor and is valued at several thousands of dollars.

—The Chicago & Alton run excursions from Metamora, Washburn, Cazenovia and Low Point to Peoria each Saturday for half rates. The local merchants object very much, as often as many as seventy-five passengers will go from Metamora to Peoria Saturdays to trade.

—The old-time county jail, which was occupied by prisoners for the past fifty years, has been sold and is now used as a private residence. The old court house is now owned by the village and bears a sign, "Opera House." It was sold by the county to the village for \$1.

Pantagraph January 26, 1900

county to the village for \$1.

—Mrs. Spiers, who kept the hotel for forty-five years, has recently quit and no longer keeps travelers. She has entertained Lincoln, Douglas, Ingersoll and most of the old-time celebrities. She is now aged and nearly ready to depart and be at rest. She is quite bright and can talk entertainingly of the old days of taverns before the time of railroads, by the hour.

—Metamora is one of the oldest towns in central Illinois. It was formerly called Hanover. The court house was located here for nearly fifty years till two years ago, when the seat of justice was moved to Eureka. The residents are now glad of the change, as business has picked up and everybody hustles now instead of depending on the court house to bring them business.

—The Metamora bank, with Mr. Peter Scherts as cashier and Mr. Ed. Knowblough as assistant, is one of the best known institutions in Woodford county. Everybody knows Peter Scherts, and he fills more positions of trust than probably any other man in the county. He is postmaster, school director and for many years was supervisor. The postoffice is connected with the bank by a door. The assistant cashier is also assistant postmaster.

—That most uncommon thing, a union church, is located at Metamora and is doing good work. As the majority of the residents of Metamora and surrounding country are Roman Catholics, the Protestant churches are rather weak. There were six of them, but as the Catholic population increased it was more and more difficult to keep up so many different places of worship, so all united and now the M. E. conference furnishes a minister who preches un denominational sermons. Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists, Christians and United Brethren worship together and dwell in peace. There is also a Lutheran church.

Pantagraph January 26, 1900

AT METAMORA.

—Cass Irving—"Old Parker Morse was a noted Abolitionist who formerly lived a few miles north of here. He was one of the best and most honest of men, but had very strong ideas on the subject of slavery. His large house was built in a peculiar manner, being so arranged that a carriage and team could be driven under large doors which would instantly close. As Mr. Morse was said to be a conductor on the underground railway, this was sometimes a necessary arrangement. It is said he used to drive to Washington, Tazewell county, and bring back slaves who were being spirited to Canada and freedom, keep them for a while and then pass them on their long and tedious way to the next station on the underground railway. Early one morning, years ago, an uncle of mine, a Quaker, rode to Mr. Morse's house, reaching there in time for breakfast. Invited to partake of the matutinal meal, he was about to take a seat when the host, calling softly, down from the garret quickly came two stalwart negro 'passengers' who had been this far transported on the 'underground' and who were invited to eat at the table. My uncle, although a Quaker, was impulsive, being young, and at times even a little profane. Startled at the sudden and unexpected appearance of the colored couple, my uncle quickly backed from the table, saying:

... can't repeat - not appropriate today

Pantagraph 1898

—Dominique Jacquin—"I have lived right here for fifty years past. At the time I came here, and later, there were a number of Funk families near here, the Portmans, the Steaders, the Brides, the Gongloffs and the Faubers, but most of them have died or moved away. Mr. A. L. Hereford, formerly state expert printer, and founder of the order known as the Court of Honor, is my son-in-law and was married here in Metamora, where he used to publish a newspaper."

—J. L. McGuire—"My father-in-law, the late Mr. Adino Page, and his brother, John Page, came here from New Hampshire in the 40's. Indian relics were then quite common and they made a fine collection. Dr. J. S. Whitmire was another famous collector of Indian curiosities as is also Mr. Cass Irving. The collections of stone implements here in Metamora are invaluable. They include Indian axes, war clubs, tomahawks, arrows, stone mortars and pestles, etc., and many Woodford county agates. None are for sale."

—D. M. Owens—"Along about 1860 a bright young lawyer came to Metamora and by his pleasant manners and kindly ways soon made hosts of friends. After a while he was elected state's attorney. At that time he had to travel in a circuit, as did the judge. This man was Hon. Adlai Stevenson, late vice-president of the United States. He went to Marshall and Tazewell counties and also prosecuted here in Metamora. While here he went down to Kentucky and returned with a wife. My wife was the first lady to call on Mrs. Stevenson here in Metamora. All the old residents of Metamora and vicinity have followed the subsequent career of Mr. Stevenson with great interest."

The 23rd Judicial District consisted of Woodford, Putnam, and Marshall Counties. One judge and one state's attorney served the district. Adlai Stevenson was the district state's attorney, but was defeated for re-election in 1868. After his term expired, he moved to Bloomington and opened a practice with James Ewing. "Stevenson was a gentleman of polished manners with a distinguished bearing and winning personality. He possessed exceedingly fine social qualities, was a fine story-teller and politician par excellence." W.L. Ellwood, June 23, 1921

—Mrs. T. A. Speires—"I have kept hotel here, in this same house, since 1855. That was the year that Lincoln and Douglas made the race for the United States Senate. Each of these noted men has eaten at my table several times, as have also Robert G. Ingersoll, David Davis, John M. Scott and many others, now gone to the better world. This place has been a hotel since 1843, and Lincoln always had a room here during court time. That, though, was before my time. I think I am the oldest hotel proprietor in the state, in continuous service, at the same stand."

Contact Us

Questions, Ideas - Love to hear from you

Laure Adams, President, 369-2353 or jrfarmer@mtco.com; Dave Pohlman, Vice President 369-3290; pohlman46@yahoo.com 367-4426; Jim Efaw, Secretary, 367-6099 or jimefaw-mahp@eggroll.com; Jack Weddle, Treasurer, 645-0963, jweddle@mtco.com; Board members: Lee Summer, 367-4059, 635-0259, lsummer@mtco.com; Rick Lotz, 648-2010, lots@mtco.com; Adam Bockler adam.bockler@gmail.com